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Garth Ennis Russ Braun Darick Robertson

The BOYS™

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Garth Ennis Darick Robertson

The BOYS™

FIFTY

In a world where costumed heroes soar through the sky and masked vigilantes prowl the night, someone's got to make sure the "supes" don't get out of line. And someone will.

Billy Butcher, Wee Hughie, Mother's Milk, The Frenchman and The Female are The Boys: a CIA-backed team of very dangerous people, each one dedicated to the struggle against the most lethal force on Earth- superpower. Some superheroes have to be watched. Some have to be controlled. And some of them- sometimes- need to be taken out of the picture.

That's when you call in **The Boys**.

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PROPER PREPARATION AND PLANNING

part three

THEY DIDN'T EVEN GET TO LIVE! THAT ANIMAL JUST SLAUGHTERED THEM! AND ALL YOU CAN SAY IS NOW I KNOW HOW HIGH THE STAKES ARE?!

Q'UEST-CE QUE C'EST...?

FUCKIN' LAMPLIGHTER FOLLOWED US YESTERDAY.

FOLLOWED MALLORY. DAUGHTER'S IN TOWN WITH THE TWINS.

NON...!

STAYIN' AT THE PIERRE. COLONEL TOOK HIS DAUGHTER TO DINNER, LEFT THE KIDS IN THE ROOM.

SON OF A BITCH JUST BURNED 'EM ALIVE, MALLORY SAW HIM FLYIN' AWAY...

WOULD THE THREE OF YOU PLEASE *GIVE US* A MINUTE--?

LET 'EM STAY.

THEY DESERVE TO KNOW WHAT'S ON THEIR BOSS'S MIND.

THOMPSON & GARAND

INDUSTRIAL IMPORTS

DESERVE TO KNOW IF HE'S STILL FIT FOR COMMAND.

WHAT?

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT COMMAND? YOU WERE A BUCK PRIVATE! YOU NEVER HELD RANK OF ANY KIND!

OH, BUT IF IT COMES TO IT--

I'M A FUCKIN' GENERAL, MATE.

A *GENERAL*--!

I LET YOU TALK ME INTO MAKING CONTACT WITH THAT VERMIN, INTO ADMITTING WE SENT THOSE *ATROCIOUS PICTURES!* AND--

AN' YOU LET YERSELF GET FOLLOWED. AN' YEAH, NOW YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LOSE SOMEONE.

THOMPSON & GARAND

DON'T.

I LET YOU AWAY WITH THE FIRST ONE 'COS YOU'RE UPSET. I DO THE SAME TO YOU AN' I'LL TAKE YER FUCKIN' HEAD OFF.

YOU LOST SOMEONE YOU REALLY CARE ABOUT. DON'T GIVE ME ANY O' THAT OL' BOLLOCKS ABOUT YER BATTALION, I'VE SEEN ENOUGH OFFICERS CRYIN' CROCODILE TEARS ABOUT THE LADS THEY USED AS CANNON FODDER.

NOW, YOU SAID I TALKED YOU INTO IT, BUT HOW HARD DID YOU REALLY MAKE ME WORK?

YOU WAS ALWAYS SO SURE THE LAMPLIGHTER WAS THE WEAK LINK--YOU SAID HE WAS A PUSSY COMPARED TO THE REST OF 'EM. THE WAY YOU USED TO CARRY ON, YOU COULDN'T WAIT TO GET STUCK INTO THE SEVEN.

THOMPSO
&
ARAND
DUSTRIAL
MPORTS

RAYNER GAVE US THE NOD. I FOLLOWED YOUR LEAD.

AN' NOW THE MOMENT'S HERE, COLONEL--

SO ARE YOU STILL AS KEEN AS YOU USED TO BE?

THE... LAST TIME I LET A MAN *TALK TO ME* LIKE THAT...

HHRRM.

THE LEGEND.

MAEVE.

BUTCHER, YOU'RE WITH ME.

THE REST OF YOU STAND BY.

THOMPSON
&
GARAND
INDUSTRIAL
IMPORTS

"I THINK YOU'VE SHAKEN SOMETHING LOOSE."

VINNIE'S COMIC

ACTION FIGUR

THEY'VE SENT OVER SOMEBODY NEW. WE'VE NEVER SEEN HIM BEFORE, I THINK HE'S FROM EDGAR'S OFFICE. BUT HE SHOWED UP HALF AN HOUR AFTER WE CALLED IT IN.

CALLED WHAT IN?

THE LAMPLIGHTER. COMING BACK LAST NIGHT, LAUGHING LIKE A FUCKING MANIAC...

DID YOU KNOW WHAT HE WAS--

NO. HE BLINDED US WITH HIS STUPID FUCKING LAMP THING, WE ALL THOUGHT HE WAS GOING OFF TO HAVE A TANTRUM.

WHAT I'M TRYING TO TELL YOU IS VOUGHT HAVE NEVER BEEN THIS HANDS-ON. EVEN WHEN YOU DID WHATEVER IT WAS THAT GOT THE HOMELANDER MOVING--HE CALLED THEM, THEY JUST TOLD US TO MEET YOU AND REPORT BACK. NO ONE ACTUALLY CAME TO SEE US.

BUT SOMEONE HAS NOW, BELIEVE ME.

HE WALKED IN, SAT DOWN, TOLD US TO TELL HIM ALL OF IT. TOLD ***US.*** HE'S CALM, HE'S POLITE, HE'S--

HE SAID ***EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT.*** THE WAY HE SAID IT, IT WAS LIKE A BUS CONDUCTOR ANNOUNCING THE FINAL SOLUTION.

THE WORDS ARE MUNDANE.

BUT...THE MEANING.

YOU KNOW WHAT THE LAMPLIGHTER DID?

WE GOT IT OUT OF HIM.

YOU KNOW WHAT WE DID?

TO PUT THE WIND UP THE HOMELANDER IN THE FIRST PLACE?

AT THE TIME I THOUGHT IT HAD TO DO WITH NINE-ELEVEN, BUT YOU'VE OBVIOUSLY GOT SOMETHING ELSE. FEEL FREE TO KEEP IT TO YOURSELVES.

VOUGHT SAID WE HAD TO GO WITH HIM--ONE MENTION OF THAT FUCKING DAY AND WE SHUT UP AND GOT MOVING. WHEN I SAW THE TWO OF YOU STANDING THERE I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO PUKE.

THEY AIN'T INTERESTED IN *YOU,* KID...

REALLY.

SO HOW EXACTLY WILL EVERYTHING *BE ALL RIGHT?*

LOOK... NO ONE KNEW WHAT THE LAMPLIGHTER HAD IN MIND. AND I THINK THEY WANT TO, TO MAKE THAT UP TO YOU...

COME AGAIN?

WHATEVER IT IS YOU HAVE, THEY SEEM TO WANT TO AVOID A CONFRONTATION.

THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT ESTABLISHING A STATUS QUO. LIVING WITH IT.

THEN WORKING ON IT.

GUESS THAT'S WHAT *WE'D* DO...

SPEAK FOR YERSELF.

YOU'RE SAYING THEY WANT TO MAKE A DEAL. WHAT COULD *THEY* PUT ON THE TABLE?

I DON'T KNOW, BUT I SUGGEST YOU TAKE IT. THAT'S WHAT I CAME DOWN HERE TO TELL YOU.

OH YEAH?

OH YEAH.

SIX OR SEVEN MONTHS AGO EVERYTHING MADE SENSE. SOMETIMES IT WAS SHITTY, BUT EVEN THE SHIT WAS SMALL AND STUPID AND LIVABLE-WITH.

AND THEN IN ONE SINGLE DAY IT ALL WENT TO HELL. *EVERYTHING* CHANGED. AND NOW YOU POP UP AND THROW THIS IN OUR FACES, AND IT FEELS LIKE WE'RE *NEVER* GOING TO HIT BOTTOM--!

THINK ABOUT WHAT COULD HAPPEN. ABOUT THE KIND OF PEOPLE THEY ARE.

IF YOU SAY NO TO WHATEVER THEY COME UP WITH, WHO ON THE GODDAMN *PLANET* WON'T GET FUCKED...?

ALL THAT SOUNDS LIKE TO ME IS YOU WANNA GO BACK TO YER NICE, QUIET LAP O' LUXURY.

OH, JESUS, DO YOU THINK I'M GOING TO ARGUE WITH YOU--?

YOU KNOW WHY I'M NOT WORRIED ABOUT THE SEVEN ASKING WHERE I AM TONIGHT? BECAUSE THEY THINK I'M A DRUNK.

BECAUSE I AM A DRUNK. I COME AND GO ALL THE TIME.

THAT FUCKING PLANE.

ONCE THE PASSENGERS KNEW THEY WEREN'T GETTING OUT, THEY TRIED TO KEEP ME ABOARD. TO DRAG ME DOWN INTO THE DARK WITH THEM.

HANDS, JUST DOZENS OF HANDS, HANGING ONTO ME. I HAD TO FLY ***THROUGH*** THE CROWD AT THE DOOR.

AND WHEN I WAS OUT... THEY WERE ALL OVER ME LIKE PASTE.

SO NOW I DRINK ALL THE TIME. AND I'M GOING TO BE DRINKING EVEN MORE, IF THAT SON OF A BITCH IS DROPPING IN ON US AND I HAVE TO--LOOK IN HIS EYES--!

YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT US. LIKE WE'RE SOME KIND OF ULTIMATE ENEMY.

BUT YOU OUGHT TO BE TALKING ABOUT HIM.

...I HATE THIS SHIT.

I WANT TO JUST LIVE INSIDE MYSELF.

C'EST JUST LIKE "LE THING". I DID NOT NOTICE WHEN WE ARRIVED.

VOUGHT BOUGHT IT FROM THE AIR FORCE AFTER IT GOT CLOSED DOWN. USED TO BE A TRANSPORT HUB FOR FLIGHTS CROSSIN' THE POLE.

AIN'T MUCH SIGN THEY BEEN USIN' IT SINCE...

THREE FUCKIN' HOURS STANDIN' THERE WITH THE BOLLOCKS FROZEN OFF US. WHEREVER THEY ARE, THE SEVEN MUST BE PISSIN' THEMSELVES.

ANYONE SEE ANY SIGN OF DELTA?

PROBABLY HAVIN' A BREW-UP. THEY MAY AS WELL BE, FOR ALL THE USE THEY ARE.

RAYNER SUGGESTED THEM AND I AGREED. IF A COUPLE OF RED RIVER SQUADS HAD SHOWN UP, YOU'D HAVE FOUND OUT WHAT USE THEY CAN BE IN NO TIME.

ALL RIGHT, SO WHERE THE FUCK ARE THEY? *HELLO?*

WONDERFUL. THEY'VE PISSED OFF.

A SPECIAL FORCES PLATOON DOES NOT PULL OUT WITHOUT ORDERS. THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO DEPLOY BACK HERE, WATCH US OUT ON THE ICE.

THIS PLACE FLOODED OR SOMETHIN'? AN' WHAT THE FUCK IS THAT GODDAMN SMELL?

OH, MON DIEU. M'SIEU MALLORY, LA FEMME EST EN ETAT D'ALERTE. I BELIEVE--

THAT WE ARE STANDING IN THEM.

ALL RIGHT, SOMEONE FIND THE FUCKIN' LIGHT SW--

THAT'S ALL RIGHT, WE'VE GOT IT.

WHAT DO YOU SAY WE GET DOWN TO BUSINESS?

YOU *DID* THIS--?

MM.

YOU COULD BARELY COPE WITH HALF A DOZEN RAGHEADS ON THAT PLANE, AN' YOU'RE TRYNNA SAY YOU DID THIS MOB WITHOUT 'EM FIRIN' A SHOT?

WELL, WE LEARNED A LESSON FROM THAT LITTLE EPISODE.

NOISE WAS CERTAINLY A CONCERN, YES. WITH YOU BARELY A MILE AWAY OUT THERE.

SO WE HAD RED RIVER USE NERVE GAS FIRST.

AND AFTER THAT IT WAS EASY.

WELL, NOT EASY, EXACTLY, THERE WAS A CERTAIN DEGREE OF PHYSICAL EFFORT. BUT YOU GAVE US PLENTY OF TIME.

YOU *SAVAGES*...

JUST ME, ACTUALLY. SOLO EFFORT.

BUT THE OTHERS DEFINITELY PLAYED THEIR PART; THEY DID AN EXCELLENT JOB OF HOLDING MY UNIFORM FOR ME.

YOU'RE TALKIN' LIKE YOU COME UP WITH THIS YERSELF.

NOT IMPORTANT.

WE'RE MAKING A POINT. WE'RE HELPING YOU SEE.

YOU KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT SEPTEMBER. YOU HAVE OTHER MATERIAL. BUT YOU SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT ALL THAT WILL ONLY TAKE YOU SO FAR.

NEVER MIND THE CERTAINTY OF YOUR OWN DEATHS. LOOK AT WHAT YOU'RE STANDING IN, AND THEN EXTRAPOLATE.

THAT SAID: AN IRREVERSIBLE DEGREE OF TURMOIL PROFITS NO ONE. WHAT WE'RE SUGGESTING IS A MUTUAL RETREAT FROM THE BRINK.

VOUGHT-AMERICAN ARE PREPARED TO SUSPEND THEIR PROGRAM OF SUPERPOWER IN NATIONAL DEFENSE--ON A TEMPORARY BASIS. THEY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE CONCEPT NEEDS SOME FURTHER THOUGHT.

GODDAMN RIGHT IT DOES...

ALSO: COLONEL MALLORY, YOU SUFFERED A PERSONAL TRAGEDY. IN THE AIRCRAFT BEHIND YOU IS AN ITEM OF COMPENSATION.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT I HATE?

SOMEWHERE IT WON'T WASH UP, IF YOU DON'T MIND.

I THINK I CAN HEAR YOUR RIDE HOME.

PROBLEM?

ARE YOU MAKIN' A FUCKIN' *SPEECH?*

HOW'S YER DAUGHTER DOIN'?

WELL, IF SHE EVER DOES TALK AGAIN, I DON'T THINK IT'LL BE TO ME.

SOMETHIN' ELSE YOU CAN CHALK UP TO THE FUCKERS.

RIGHT, WELL, M.M'S BEEN LOOKIN' AT--

RAYNER CALLED ME THIS MORNING. OUR FUNDING'S BEEN PULLED.

SHE FUCKIN' WHAT?

IT DIDN'T COME FROM HER.

THE PRESIDENT IS CONCERNED THAT THINGS WENT TOO FAR. OR VERY NEARLY DID, AT LEAST.

I THINK THAT PRESSURE'S BEEN BROUGHT TO BEAR. A C.I.A.-BACKED UNIT CHARGED WITH SUPERHUMAN SURVEILLANCE IS A LIABILITY TO HIM, ESPECIALLY WITH A VOUGHT-AMERICAN MAN IN THE V.P.'S OFFICE.

FOR THE MOMENT...HE HAS TO BE SEEN TO PROCEED WITH CAUTION.

HOW HARD DID YOU FIGHT THIS?

...I'M DONE.

YOU'RE DONE.

YES.

I SHOT A MAN AND IT FELT AS POINTLESS AS IT ALWAYS DID. I TRIED TO MAKE IT INTO SOMETHING ABOUT...JUSTICE, BUT...COME ON.

I'VE BEEN WALKING DOWN THIS ROAD SINCE NINETEEN FORTY-FOUR. KIM AND KARA DIED LAST WEEK, DO YOU REALLY THINK THAT'S WHAT BURNED ME OUT?

IT ALL MOUNTS UP. IT'S A HUNDRED THOUSAND THINGS.

DAKOTA BOB'S OUT OF HIS MIND IF HE THINKS THE BASTARDS'LL STOP HERE.

SO YOU GOT WHAT YOU WERE AFTER. THEY LET YOU PUT A BULLET IN SOMEONE, AN' THAT'S IT.

FUCK ME AN' THE REST O' THEM: YOU'RE SORTED.

WELL, MAYBE ONE DAY HE'LL REALIZE HE HAS TO FIGHT. MAYBE THEN YOU'LL GET THE CALL.

BUT I'M...

DONE.

YEAH, YOU SAID THAT.

FIFTEEN FUCKIN' YEARS SINCE YOU TOLD ME I'D HAVE THAT CUNT IN MY SIGHTS, AN' THERE HE WAS NOT TWO FOOT AWAY--!

HE WOULD HAVE KILLED YOU.

THERE'S PART O' ME WOULDN'T'VE GIVEN A FUCK. JUST TO SPEND ONE SECOND WITH ME HANDS AROUND HIS NECK, THAT WOULDA BEEN...

INSTEAD WE END UP MAKIN' POXY FUCKIN' DEALS.

AH, SHIT.

I WAS NEVER GONNA GET A GO AT HIM, WAS I?

WHAT...?

YOU KNEW THEY'D NEVER HAVE THE BOLLOCKS FOR IT. TO REALLY TAKE ON VOUGHT.

WHAT'S A DICKHEAD LIKE ME NEXT TO THE GREATEST SUPE THAT EVER LIVED?

THE MOST EXPENSIVE FUCKIN' ASSET O' THE BIGGEST CORPORATION IN THE WORLD?

YOU KNEW WHAT I'D LOST. BUT YOU STOOD IN THAT CELL AN' YOU STILL...

ALL YOU WANTED WAS A PIT BULL, WASN'T IT?

I...

FUCK OFF.

FUCK OFF OR I WILL BURY YOU NEXT TO THEM TWO LITTLE GIRLS.

YOU SAID YOU WOULDN'T HAVE CARED IF HE'D KILLED YOU.

WHAT ABOUT US?

BUTCHER?

UNION STATION

HE LOST HIS BOTTLE, DIDN'T HE, TERROR?
OL' MALLORY.

HE LOST HIS BOTTLE AN' THE BOYS JUST FELL TO PIECES.

IF YOU WANT SOMETHIN' DONE RIGHT YOU HAVE TO DO IT YERSELF, THAT'S THE FUCKIN' LESSON THERE.
WATERGATE HOTEL, PLEASE, MATE.
NO PETS.
NAH, HE'S A GUIDE DOG. WHAT DO YOU CALL IT, UH, A SEEIN' EYE DOG?
TAXI

YOU AIN'T BLIND...
20
WELL, THEY GAVE HIM THE NIGHT OFF, DIDN'T THEY? HERE.

MALLORY.

WE SORTED, THEN?

MM.

MAGIC.

OH, YOU SNEAKY FUCKIN' CUNT.

next: MONKEY MAGIC

Pin-up art by
P.J. HOLDEN

HANGING OUT WITH GARTH ENNIS AND THE BOYS

By Troy Brownfield • Originally posted on NEWSARAMA.COM on May 5, 2010

Issue #42 of “The Boys” hits stores today, and the penultimate issue of “The Innocents” arc seems to be moving the title closer to its endgame. Though, as Ennis tells us, the ultimate conclusion is still over two years away, events in the book have been accelerating with Butcher’s suspicions of Hughie, the lingering question of Starlight, and much more. We caught up with writer Garth Ennis to check up on “The Boys” and to see where things stand.

Newsarama: What’s your view of how the series has gone thus far? How much of it has gone exactly to plan, and how many of the storylines have branched off in ways that you may not have intended, but nevertheless followed?

Garth Ennis: Things always go off in their own direction, that's part of what makes writing enjoyable. What I like to do is have a rough outline in mind I can use as a base for each story. Example- the St. Patrick's day episode in We Gotta Go Now. I'd been wanting to share my thoughts on St. Pat's for some time, but it was only when I started the story that I realized a bunch of subhuman frat boys provided the perfect means to express them.

Nrama: We’re doing this interview as the SuperDuper/Malchemical storyline is just about to wrap. After many teams filled with, as you might say, right bastards, here’s a team that’s not so bad. Why include the seemingly more optimistic SuperDuper?

Ennis: I'd been thinking about the notion of real superheroes, or perhaps more accurately standard superheroes- the kind you find in 99% of superhero comic books. Develop powers, put on outfit, set out to battle evil. I was wondering where people like that would end up in the real world, and of course the answer is that they'd all be shot to death by criminals or police, or locked up in lunatic asylums. But what if they weren't? What would a corporation like Vought-American do with such innocents, how would they make money off them?

Nrama: At this point, Butcher has become very suspicious of Hughie. Is it totally outside of Butcher’s character to give anyone the benefit of the doubt?

Ennis: There's no doubt that Butcher's fond of Hughie, or at least who he initially believed Hughie to be before he got suspicious, and he wants to be absolutely sure before he acts. Almost anyone else would probably get their neck wrung on the spot.

Nrama: You’ve never been shy about frank depictions of violence, language or sexuality in your books. Occasionally, it’s drawn some critical fire. Why is important to you as a creator to present your story in precisely this way?

Ennis: Honesty. If you kick someone in the face, their jaw's going to break and send blood and teeth flying everywhere. If you're baling out of a burning tank, you're going to say more than "good gracious." And if you perform cunilingus at the wrong time of the month, you're going to get a facefull of what Hughie got. Although to be honest, that one was more for laughs.

Nrama: It’s ironic that the genre you’ve chosen to parody (that is, super-heroes) has grown increasingly violent during the actual run of “The Boys” itself. Do you find it difficult to write “The Boys” in the way that you do when, for example, members of the Teen Titans are being eaten by giant dogs and Avengers are getting ripped in half during crossover?

Ennis: Not at all, I don't read any of it.

Nrama: Another interesting turn is the fact that a reader will need more than a little super-hero knowledge to get all of the references that you've incorporated into the book. Is that itself a meta-comment on the frequently insular nature of mainstream super-hero comics, or is that just a side effect of taking swipes at a pretty expansive library of characters and concepts?

Ennis: The latter. Example- in terms of a mainstream readership, the Legion of Superheroes are pretty obscure characters, but you can't work in this industry for twenty years (all of which I've spent on the DC comps list) and not become vaguely aware of them. I don't think I've ever read an issue cover to cover, but I've at least seen illos of Bouncing Boy and so on. And it's hard to look at characters like that and not include them in The Boys eventually.

Nrama: From this point out, approximately how much of the series is left, and will there be any other branching mini-series like "Herogasm" before that conclusion?

Ennis: The book runs until #70. This summer we've got "Highland Laddie", a six-part miniseries featuring Hughie's origin- "Herogasm" artist John McCrea is drawing that now. Same time next year we'll have a similar mini starring Butcher, which I'm two episodes into and enjoying enormously.

Nrama: Do you envision "The Boys" as your final word on the super-hero style book?

Ennis: Jesus, I hope so.

Nrama: As "The Boys" wraps, are you eyeing an further long-terms projects? If so, will they include more "Battlefields"?

Ennis: Definitely more war stories, hopefully including at least one more Battlefields series. A third series of Wormwood at some point, featuring the second coming- sort of. Beyond that, plenty of ideas but nothing definite at this point. "The Boys" has two and a half years to go, I've plenty of time yet.

Nrama: We can't let this finish without at least a few words about [artist Darick] Robertson. On a scale of 1-10, how essential has his contribution been? What does he bring to "The Boys" that other artists might not?

Ennis: Vital. He brought his own unique vision to the Boys and their world, provided the perfect template for other artists to work from. Butcher and Hughie in particular, I think, could only have been visualized by Darick.

Early sketch of The Boys
by Darick Robertson

Pin-up art by
ROB STEEN

GARTH ENNIS TALKS THE BOYS AND MORE

By Heidi MacDonald • Originally posted on COMICSBEAT.COM on February 9, 2007

Two weeks ago the news broke that DC/Wildstorm was canceling The Boys, the dark and scabrous superhero book by Garth Ennis and Darick Robertson, due to content concerns. DC graciously agreed to let Ennis and Robertson take the book to a new publisher – even though the book is creator owned, DC could have held it up for a while, but chose not do. They also gave Robertson leave to work on the book outside of his DC exclusive contract.

While the Internets went wild speculating on the exact reason for the cancellation, publishers were swamping the creators with offers. It was a Cinderella story, with The Boys, a covert ops team of blaspheming hooligans brought together to rein in superheroes who get too big for their britches, the ones trying on the glass combat boot.

This week it was announced that Nick Barucci's Dynamite Entertainment would be the new home of The Boys. A trade collecting issues 1-6 and the already completed issue #7 are waiting in the wings to spring more mayhem on an adoring public.

Ennis agreed to a brief interview explaining as much of the behind the scenes of the last few weeks as he could. So let's just get to it.

THE BEAT: In terms of moving to Dynamite what can you tell us about the time frame?

ENNIS: We are hoping it will be a matter of a couple of months. I can't tell you much more than that at the moment. The problem is, of course, we're at the very early days here. But we're hoping it will be a matter of a couple of months. It's a shame I can't tell you more!

THE BEAT: Issue 7 was already completed, right?

ENNIS: Yes, #7 was in the can and parts of 8 through 11.

THE BEAT: So it's in pretty good shape.

Darick is still exclusive so I imagine he'll be doing some stuff for DC. Can you talk about his schedule at all?

ENNIS: He can tell you more about that but as far as I know he intends to be doing a fair bit of stuff for DC.

THE BEAT: So…why did you choose Dynamite?

ENNIS: Well, a number of things. They're not too big, so we're not going to get lost, and they're not too small, so the company's not going to go under before we finish publishing the thing. Nicky Barucci played a big part. Darick and I know him to begin with. He's someone that I like and trust and am looking forward to working with for those reasons. We both see Nicky as a guy who's going to work his ass off to make this book a success. We know he's going to go all out to promote it and do all he can to make sure it succeeds. As I mentioned earlier, at a big company you might get lost. People have a tendency to maybe put out the book and say, "Here's your book, sink or swim, best of luck." We think we're going to get a little more personal attention at Dynamite and that's going to make all the difference.

THE BEAT: Speaking of big companies, let me go back a bit and talk a bit about the previous history of The Boys. What was your original plan to "out-Preacher Preacher?" What did that mean?

ENNIS: What that meant—the most direct translation was "Look at this. Look at this. Buy it." Beyond that, it was really just something to stick on a poster like "In space no one can hear you scream." Something like that. I think it communicates a vague sense that this is going to be an extreme book and there's going to be a lot of naughty things in it. Beyond that it was really just something for promotional purposes.

THE BEAT: And it was put on a poster, correct?

ENNIS: Yes, exactly. What we're going to put on the next poster, I don't know. Actually, I do have a bit of an inkling, but you'll have to wait and see.

THE BEAT: Okay, we'll be waiting. What can you tell us about the specific problems that caused The Boys to leave DC?

ENNIS: I think if I were to sum it up in one line, it would be that you can have comics where people do awful things to each other, like Preacher, but you can't have a comic where super people do awful things to each other, like The Boys, and I think that rather than any specific instances—panels or pages or lines in the story—that was really the problem in a nutshell. When you have comics that—even superficially—look a bit too much like the company's regular output, and the characters in them are doing the most ghastly things and behaving in the most awful way, and blaspheming and swearing and so on, that creates a real problem. That just will not fly. And that, more than anything else, was what brought an end to The Boys time at DC.

THE BEAT: So it wasn't like, what people have been speculating, a big wig at DC specifically opening up the book and seeing a hamster crawling out of a dead man's ass and saying, we can't publish this.

ENNIS: That's in issue 6. I think once they had a chance to read the whole thing, the damage was done long before issue 6. If I could just guess at a couple of things, there's an orgy sequence in issue 4, there's a sequence in issue 3 where a girl has to effectively blow her way onto a superteam. Things like that did the real damage long before any hamsters appeared.

THE BEAT: Why do you take so much joy in destroying the wholesome image of the superhero?

ENNIS: Well, I don't know about destroying, Destroying sounds kind of final and I think we know that superhero comics will be around a long time after The Boys has finished.

Why do I find it so interesting? Just as with Preacher I was sort of having a go at something I don't like, Christianity, organized religion, in that instance, faith and its abuses, so with The Boys I was doing the same thing in the shape of superhero comics. The whole thing started as I recall about 5 or 6 years ago when me old chum Steve Dillon gave me a couple of James Ellroy books for my birthday, American Tabloid and The Cold Six Thousand, which are both excellent and I thoroughly recommend them. I've read Ellroy before but with these two what he was doing was winding politics and history and crime together to form a picture of American life in the 50s and 60s that I don't think had been done in that way before. He was really forcing us to acknowledge, as he himself put it in the introduction, the debt that we owe to bad men. The way that bad men have helped to form our political life over the past 50 years. He was talking about everyone from the FBI to the CIA to the Mafia to corrupt policemen, to bent politicians…

THE BEAT: A wonderful spectrum!

ENNIS: Indeed. So I read these books and I loved them and I just began to think what would it be like if I did that with superheroes. What would it be if I took 50 years of superhero history and put the same spin on it? You look at what really happened. What goes on behind the mask, what goes on behind the public version of events, the official history that we're fed. The Boys is more or less what I came up with.

Why superheroes, as with many other things that I don't like or don't care about, I find at the same time there's something weirdly fascinating about them. Not done the way they're normally done but as a place to begin, as a thing to twist and do in a different way. I think you've got all kinds of opportunities and possibilities then.

THE BEAT: Well in listening to you speak, it does become a lot more clear, why perhaps publishing this book at a publisher best known for superheroes probably wasn't going to work out.

ENNIS: Yes, there was a sense all along of well, hardly believing we were able to do this thing, and yet as issues went by and there was no response or no reaction, I thought, "Oh well, maybe we're going to be okay. Maybe we're doing all right. Maybe the fact that we're at Wildstorm which is its own odd little corner of the company to begin with, is going to work for us." Famous last words, as it turned out.

I would like to say thanks again to the guys at

Pin-up art by
NICK ABADZIS

Wildstorm, Ben and Scott and Jim. If anyone's the loser in all of this, it's going to be [Wildstorm]. I think this is probably going to curtail their ability to do Mature Readers books and it's shame when that happens to anyone, I think. At the end of the day Darick and I are going to be able to take our book and go somewhere else and do it with a lot more creative freedom, make more money and probably get a bit more attention because of all this. DC, they're fine. They're going to divest themselves of something they don't want. The readers will get their book back. The retailers will get their book back, hopefully after not too long a delay. So yeah it's the Wildstorm guys I feel the most sorry for.

THE BEAT: To an observer, it seems that DC has acted in a very fair manner, all things considered. But it wasn't like there was a struggle leading up to it every issue.

ENNIS: No. Jim Lee was very very helpful along the way when one or two things came up, but not really. [But the situation is really for the best.] We could have been absolutely sunk. They could have insisted on continuing to publish some neutered form of the book, which would have been absolutely impossible. Instead they're just doing the sensible thing and saying, "Look, we can't do anything with this, we don't want it. You take it back and have fun."

THE BEAT: It's certainly commendable. So after this news broke, I understand you suddenly became the belle of the ball. You were very popular.

ENNIS: (chuckles.) I think all told we had about a dozen offers from different publishers. Not all of them quite lasted the course. Once they found out what it would entail, they gracefully backed out. And that's cool. But yes for the last couple of weeks, Darick and I have been considering offers from all these people. And for the most part they've been very nice about it. Even when I delivered the bad news to most of them the other day, the most common response I got was "Oh well, maybe we can do something again, best of luck. "

THE BEAT: I imagine you heard from a lot of people you had never considered working for before and perhaps you didn't this time, but was there anything that surprised you about what you were hearing or observations you drew?

ENNIS: Not so much from talking to the publishers. I found the response to the announcement that The Boys was being cancelled quite interesting. Going online and looking at message boards, which is something I never do. It was interesting. It wouldn't necessarily encourage me to do it again, because we're talking about thoroughly exceptional circumstances here. But it helped to see that the book was working, that there was a definite base of support for it. You see sales figures but that's just a number.

But it's encouraging to see that a lot of people are understanding the book for what it is, and want more of the same. So that you're not just singing in the wilderness, as it were.

THE BEAT: You're definitely in something of a unique position in that you're one of the few comic creators with a track record that is strong enough to be a brand name. Did you ever consider doing something with The Boys where you would have more of the back end deal? An Image-type deal where you would have more risk up front but the payoff would be bigger down the line? You are one of the few people for whom that would be a very small risk.

ENNIS: Well, I do have Darick to think about there. What's easy for me to do is not necessarily easy for him.

THE BEAT: There are still so many constraints between being paid a page rate and having any great creative freedom.

ENNIS: Generally the smaller the publisher the more the creative freedom you get. At Avatar, William [Christensen] pays me the same as DC does, but there is absolutely no restraint whatsoever. Avatar is where I run up against my own limits, probably before I run up against William's actually! And I think the same will be true of Nicky, too.

THE BEAT: I can't imagine Nick will try to rein you in too much!

ENNIS: Apart from anything else, Nick knows what he's getting—he's read the first six issues.

THE BEAT: Right, it's not a pig in a poke for anyone. So this is supposed to be a 60 issue story overall…what's going to happen to Wee Hughie and everyone?

ENNIS: Well, let's see. The next four issue storyline is called "Get Some." And it's the pervy one. They find themselves investigating a superhero in New York, someone who has developed a rather embarrassing problem. And it's kind of a smaller scale story than the first one, just to show Hughie building a relationship with the rest of them, Butcher introducing him and teaching him a lot more about how they work. [We also meet] some allies of the Boys who are kind of important in the way they carry out their missions.

THE BEAT: So there's more to this world to see.

ENNIS: Very much so. It's not simply superheroes do awful things every month. Gradually the more you get into it, the more you'll see that the people behind the superhero and the people behind the Boys are part of a wider political drama being played out. Butcher drops a couple of hints about it when he's talking to Hughie towards the end of issue 6 about the state of play politically in America, the superhero version of America. You'll see a lot more of that.

The third storyline, which begins in issue 11, moves the story to Russia, temporarily, where you'll see a lot of the international political stage and where the Boys figure in that.

THE BEAT: When I asked you earlier about why take on superheroes you made it pretty clear, but there have been other dark takes on superheroes, like The Authority. Was that an influence on you?

ENNIS: Not really. As usual, my influences kind of come from outside comics. Very much in the creation of The Boys themselves and the world they're in. It's a very very dark view of the world, although some might say it's an accurate one, although it's got superheroes slotted into it. You have to think of things like Hollywood Babylon…My own take on superheroes is that if they really existed they'd be between movie stars and politicians. They'd be movie stars because they'd be glamorous and fabulous looking and the people would follow their lives exactly as if they were reading fictional adventures. But they'd be like politicians because they'd have a genuine and tangible effect on our lives and our world.

THE BEAT: Right, so it wouldn't be just like Angelina and Brad jaunting around.

ENNIS: It would be as if Angelina and Brad were the First Couple.

THE BEAT: The other Boys [besides Hughie] seem to be a rather dark and nebulous crew.

ENNIS: You'll learn more about them as you go. You won't learn everything right away. We'll peel back the layers a little bit at a time while involving the characters in ongoing adventures. I have to say that with The Boys it was the first time I consciously sat down deliberately determined to write a 60 chapter graphic novel. I decided from the word go—a little arrogant, but I did it—[that] this is going to last five years. Ironic in the light of what happened, but I thought, this is going to last five years, 60 issues, it's going to be 8 to 10 books, it's going to last, and I have to think about each episode of it, not as a stand alone issue, but as a chapter of a story. With Preacher and Hitman I couldn't really do that because, frankly, I had no idea they were going to last. This is the first time I've really been able to do that. In the case of the other two, I had a rough idea of where things were going. With this I have a definite sense of the book developing as it goes, sort of at its own damn pace really.

THE BEAT: Will there be anyone coming along who's a little bit lovable?

ENNIS: Well, lovable is in the eye of the beholder, but I think you'll find out more about the characters, you'll see why they are the way they are. You might have a bit more sympathy for them as you discover more. I don't know. You may find also that just because they act one way in a fight, in combat, or just because they have an attitude towards superheroes, that seems particularly hostile, doesn't mean they are that way generally.

Also there will be new characters and some people that we've already met, not necessarily in the Boys, who will be fleshed out a little more and will turn out, much to their own surprise, perhaps, to be much different people than who we thought they were. One obvious one, and I don't think I'm giving anything away here, would be Annie January, whose unfortunate initiation to the Seven we saw in issue #3. I think I can promise you a "rich tapestry."

THE BEAT: What else are you working on now?

ENNIS: Right now, finishing up the last issue of WORMWOOD, which I'm having a ball with, one of my favorite things I've been writing recently. Just about to write issue 50 of The Punisher, which is pretty cool. It's going to be a double sized one, with art by Goran Parlov who I think is the discovery of last year.

THE BEAT: He's one of the very best Gorans!

ENNIS: Yes, he's a quality Goran, there's no doubt about it. Issue 50 is going to surprise a lot of people I think. It's going to take us down a road we weren't expecting maybe.

There's a Western from Avatar I'm writing called Streets of Glory. Mike Wolfer is drawing that but it won't be out probably for a year. Another Punisher mini-series for John Romita Jr. Another miniseries called Back to Brooklyn from an idea that Jimmy Palmiotti and I came up with. Not sure yet of the publisher. Apart from that I've got a few upcoming things I can't talk about just yet.

THE BEAT: Here's a question that comes up all the time, so let's get it out of the way. What is the status of City Lights? [This is a graphic novel by Ennis and Steve Dillon that has been in the works at Vertigo for at least five years.]

ENNIS: Don't hold your breath is the status of City Lights. Really, Steve is in no shape to be doing it right now. He's doing his Wolverine book and he's getting a lot of attention and making a lot of money, all of the stuff due to him. But really, I would have to say, don't hold your breath at all.

THE BEAT: But it is something you would still like to do?

ENNIS: Oh, we are going to do it. If there's one thing I know about that story, we both have the confidence in it. When we do get around to it, it will be a story very much worth telling. We just made the mistake of allowing ourselves to be rushed into announcing it. Round about that time there was a lot of stuff happening that we couldn't have foreseen and it really did throw everything a curve.

THE BEAT: And now another obligatory, must-ask question: the Preacher TV show! [Director Mark Steven Johnson is working on a Preacher show for HBO.]

ENNIS: Oh right. Yes.

THE BEAT: What's going on with that?

ENNIS: Well, I know people are going crazy over this, but frankly we've taken barely a step down that road. It's far, far too early to say. I believe that Mark Steven Johnson is working on an adaptation, obviously, a first episode. And I'm going to see him next week and we're going to talk about what he's come up and where we think it should go, and all that kind of stuff.

THE BEAT: So he's keeping you in the loop?

ENNIS: Very much so.

THE BEAT: And you have a good working relationship with him?

ENNIS: So far I have no complaints.

Early sketch of Wee Hughie
by Darick Robertson

Pin-up art by
JOHN HIGGINS